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By As

- INDONESIA -

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THE PEASANTS AND THE AUGUST REVOLUTION

-Indonesia-

[Following is the translation of an article by As in Suara Tani (Voice of the Peasants), Vol XI, No 10, Djakarta, October 1960.]

Every commemoration of 17 August 1945 brings to mind events of the revolution. Memories of many inspiring and beautiful things come to mind, rich with bravery. The slogan "Liberty or Death!" was upheld by the thousands of freedom-loving heroes who died for freedom. 17 August 1945 also left us with mementos of the success of the people's revolution. The slogan "Neither the mountains nor the high seas can hinder us" was born. What reactionary force was not afraid to face such bravery and strength? The formerly powerful sacred officials now must bow to the will of the people.

The peasants of Indonesia backed the proclamation with high spirit and with hearts of steel. Japanese fascism robbed the people of their rice, their labor, their democratic institutions, and whatever else they might have had and replaced them with powdered tapioca for food and sacks for clothing. This inhuman treatment left their bodies mere skeletons and their hearts so filled with hate that they rose heroically against Japanese fascism in Singapore, Indramadju and Aron (North Sumatra), among other places, which helped consolidate their strength in the revolution.

The active participation of the peasants in the revolution made the job of disarming the armed forces of Japan easier, and the destruction of the fascist government of Japan made possible the institution of the republic of Indonesia. Such was the character of the revolution to defend the Republic of Indonesia from the colonial troops of Great Britain and Holland.

The course of events would have been different if the disarming of the Japanese troops by the Indonesians in the towns had not been followed by the coming of peasants in hordes armed with pointed bamboo sticks to stop the Japanese fleeing through the villages. Who knows what might have happened if the guerilla forces fighting against the colonial troops of Great Britain and later Holland had not been actively aided by the peasants?

All patriots of Indonesia acknowledged the magnitude of the role of the peasants. Above all, even the traitors who witnessed the unity

and the contribution by the peasants to the cause of the revolution might have been shamed from one generation to the seventh.

Even though no program was designed especially to meet the demands of the peasants, many improvements were brought about. Vestiges of autocratic colonial rule in the villages were replaced with an institution of limited democratic attributes, known as the KNI Desa, [abbreviation not explained in source] to lead the revolution. Japanese henchmen and other village heads who opposed the direction of the central revolution were replaced by elected officials.

The village heads responsible to the KNI Desa were charged with the daily affairs of the village. The KNI Desa later became the Dewan-Dewan Desa. Large farming areas were distributed to individual landless peasants. Road and property taxes were abolished. On the other hand, the peasants never hesitated to give what they had to help the revolution. Knee-bowing to officials was abolished. Officials who were opposed to the revolution were ousted and replaced. In the villages were established defense, and arms and supplies were provided the peasants. The peasants also took economic action against the Japanese and Dutch oppressors by taking over and cultivating unattended Japanese and Dutch estates. The confiscation of the oppressors' estates was of tremendous help to the revolution. This action weakened the economic position of the imperialists while it strengthened that of the revolutionaries. In the villages rice-barn cooperatives were erected to supply seed and food.

The revolution has taught the peasants to organize. At first only in BTI [abbreviation not expanded in source]. Later on various peasant organizations grew up as a result of the ever mounting number of parties in Indonesia. The birth of political parties has given the peasants the highest kind of political education. Some of them took a leading part in their party. With the passage of time, the peasants learned which party represents the oppressed, which one hurts them, which one gives lip service, and which one really cares for their welfare.

The 1945 revolution gave them experience in how to take an active role, enabling them to control politics and strengthen democratic institutions capable of managing the economy and defending the revolution against armed enemy aggression. The lessons acquired during the revolution were rich and deep. This experience will never be lost in the waves of counter-revolution, no matter how fierce they might be.

The deciding factor in a revolution is that of the peasants. No revolution could be successful without the peasants. There is no true revolution without the participation of the peasants.

The KMB agreement [abbreviation not explained in source], high-pressed by the Dutch imperialist with the aid of the US, caused the 1945 revolution to fail in its objectives. The KMB [abbreviation not expanded in source] agreement gave Indonesia only political gain. Economically it operated under the old colonial system. Foreign capital controlled the scene again. Land monopolies, both foreign and national, and the oppressive feudal system, which during the revolution was not quite destroyed, revived. West New Guinea, which represents 20 percent

of Indonesia's territory, is still occupied by the Dutch. Members of the cabinet, after the conclusion of the KMB agreement until it was later repealed, were in no small way taking a negative role toward the interest of the peasants, and took gigantic steps to return foreign capital to its vested colonial position. In general, members of the cabinet gradually abolished the hard-won advances of the peasants, acquired during the revolution of August 1945. This action was started by the Hatta-Sukiman cabinet toward the end of 1948, destroying the democratic institutions in the villages and replacing them with officials appointed on the basis of IGO and IGOB [abbreviation not explained in source⁷], a facimile of the colonial regime where village heads occupy positions as autocratic rulers, reviving property and road taxes. Succeeding cabinets continued to oust the peasants from their expropriated farm land and turn them over to the foreign landlords. Multitudes of peasants were hauled to jail because they refused to give up their gains. The government, after the signing of the KMB agreement, was felt by the peasants to be incapable or unwilling to fight for the ideals of the 1945 revolution. This experience taught the peasants to rely on their own strength and fight harder for the repeal of the KMB agreement, so that a government of their choice would be in power to fight for the demands of the revolution.

Learning from their own experience, the peasants realized that the August 1945 revolution must be a fight to liquidate the strangulation of the economy of the country by the imperialists and at the same time must embrace democratic principles dedicated to wiping out the oppressive feudal system. They also learned that the August 1945 revolution had to be an agrarian reform. The revolution can be said to be successfully concluded only if it can abolish the land monopoly of the landlords and subscribe to the slogan "Land for the landless."

Learning from their own experience, the peasants with the passage of time realized that to have a successful revolution with its accompanying freedoms, they must work together with the proletariat and its party, the PKI [Communist Party of Indonesia], an organization dedicated to the freedom of the masses.

Although the KMB agreement through public pressures has been repealed and a great majority of Dutch enterprises nationalized, the peasants are as yet unable to have their daily lot improved nor to have democratic institutions established in the villages, because the feudal system continues in operation.

The operations of the feudal system in the villages is the main source of roots giving life to those sponsoring the continuation of foreign monopolistic capital, crystallized in the armed rebellion of the "PRRI - Permesta" and DI-TII [abbreviations not explained in source⁷] led by the imperialists. Continuation of the feudal system results in sufferings and backwardness of the peasants, who represent the majority of the Indonesian people. It is indeed impossible to improve the economy or to destroy the feudal system when the PRRI - Permesta and the DI-TII are allowed to continue their counter-revolution. It becomes very clear

that the role the peasants lend toward the revolution is the backbone which will ultimately destroy the armed rebellion of the PRRI and the evils of imperialism to its roots.

Celebration of the 15th anniversary of 17 August 1945 reminds us of the economic hardship the peasants and other segments of the workers of Indonesia are suffering from, as well as the deprivation of democratic freedom. Amid the sufferings, however, we have one consolation and that is that one year after the revolution we produced a political Manifesto and the USDek [abbreviation not explained in source] which expose and isolate political parties such as Masjumi and PSI, among the leaders of which are found supporters of PRRI and DI-TII. On the whole, the 15 anniversary may be said to mark an advance, in that the exploitative nature of the feudal system becomes a public issue and the position of the landlords is greatly shaken through the enactment of UU [not explained in source] legislation. In essence the UU legislation lightens the burden of the peasants. The legislation gives leverage to their claim that land properly belongs to the peasants and aids their efforts to stop the exploitation by landlords.

The 15th anniversary should be an occasion for the peasants to strengthen their unity and to see to it that the political Manifesto and USDEK apply their teeth in a gradual manner to abolish the vestiges of the feudal system and to provide for them an economic improvement and the return of democratic institutions to the people.

This 15th anniversary we celebrate at a time when the imperialist forces, secretly headed by the United States, are trying hard to worsen world tension, designed to bring about World War III by supporting continued occupation of New Guinea by the Dutch. It becomes the duty of the peasants to muster their strength to promote world peace and to expel the Dutch from West New Guinea and to return this territory to the proper jurisdiction of the republic of Indonesia.

To fight for the abolition of the remnants of the feudal system, for the extension of democratic freedom, for the liquidation of Dutch imperialism, and for the promotion of peace means the application of the political Manifesto in line with the ideals of the proclamation of 17 August 1945.